



Cooperation in England

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THE MOST important event in library cooperation in England has undoubtedly been the formation of the British Library. It has brought together the former British Museum Library, the National Reference Library for Science and Invention, the National Central Library (NCL), the National Lending Library for Science and Technology (NLLST), and the British National Bibliography. These institutions are now in one organization under the British Library Board, with the resources to create a national library service probably without rival in the world.¹

The British Library operates in three divisions. The reference division constitutes the largest and most important book and manuscript collection in Great Britain. Its functions are to collect not only all British books, but as much as possible of important foreign material in all subject fields; to make this material available to users who wish to consult it; and to extend facilities to others by means of catalog services, photocopies and information services.

The lending division has developed an interlibrary lending service—based on the former National Central Library and the National Lending Library for Science and Technology at Boston Spa, Yorkshire—whose function is to support the library system of the country by providing a loan and photocopy service to other libraries. It achieves this mainly by its extensive acquisition program which includes all significant periodicals regardless of language, all important worthwhile English-language monographs, and all available report literature. It supplements its own stock with a union catalog of other libraries' holdings and by cooperation with regional interlending organizations in the United Kingdom. During 1973-74, 1,832,000 requests were received by the British Library Lending Division (BLLD) as compared with 1,757,000 by the NCL and NLLST in the previous

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year. In addition to demand from libraries in the United Kingdom, it received 160,000 requests from overseas.

A significant recent development has been the involvement in interlibrary lending of libraries which had not previously cooperated to any great extent. The most important of these are the libraries enjoying legal deposit under the Copyright Act (excluding the British Library Reference Division) and libraries with significant special collections such as the library of the Royal Society of Medicine and the British Museum (Natural History) Library.

The United Kingdom center for MEDLARS (Medical Literature Analysis and Retrieval System) is housed in the BLLD at Boston Spa, is responsible for British input to the data base in Washington, D.C., and organizes searches within the United Kingdom.

At the International Federation of Library Associations (IFLA) Conference in Washington, D.C., in November 1974, the Committee of International Lending and Union Catalogues recommended the establishment at Boston Spa of an Office for International Lending; this recommendation now goes to the executive board of IFLA.²

The bibliographic services division of the British Library (BLBSD), which has as its nucleus the former British National Bibliography (previously run as a commercial company), has as its functions the production of the British National Bibliography, the processing of acquisitions of the British Library, and the development in the United Kingdom of a computer-based system for the storing and handling of bibliographic information for use by libraries. The computer-based service, known as the British Library MARC Service,³ is being offered to libraries and consists of: (1) the retrospective UK MARC file, 1950-74; (2) the current UK MARC file, 1975-; (3) the retrospective Library of Congress MARC files, 1968-74; and (4) the current Library of Congress MARC files, 1975-. The services being offered are: (1) a comprehensive tape file service, in which libraries will receive one or more of the above files (or subset files), either direct from BLBSD or through an intermediate processing agency; (2) a selective record service, in which BLBSD will carry out a search of the MARC files for specific bibliographic records requested by a library; and (3) a full catalog service, based on the selective record service, in which BLBSD will undertake to produce updated computer-based catalogs for individual libraries. Such catalogs would be derived primarily from the MARC files but would also include local data and local variations and would not necessarily contain all the data held on the full MARC record.

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The U.K. National Serials Data Centre has also been established within the BLBSD and is responsible for registering and numbering serials published in the United Kingdom and for fulfilling requests for the International Standard Serial Number for any serial.

In April 1974, most of the functions of the Office of Scientific and Technical Information (OSTI) were transferred from the Department of Education and Science to the British Library to form the nucleus of the Research and Development Department. The department promotes and supports research and development related to library and information operations in all subject fields. Many of the developments taking place independently in library cooperation owe their original impetus to grants from OSTI.

One of the most interesting of these is the Birmingham Libraries' Cooperative Mechanisation Project (BLCMP).⁴ Established in 1969, its aim has been to design and develop a system to utilize centrally produced machine-readable bibliographic records in MARC format in local libraries, and to assess the practicability of a regional data bank, accessible to a number of libraries, using these records as well as locally produced records. A union catalog data base of the original three participants—the Universities of Aston and Birmingham and the Birmingham Public Libraries—was established in 1972. This data base efficiently provides the following products and services to these libraries: catalog cards for author, classified and title catalogs for Aston University; a hard copy book-form author catalog for Birmingham Reference Library, and author catalog for the lending library; and COM (computer output microfilm) author catalog for the union catalog and Birmingham University. Hard copy and COM subject catalogs are produced for Birmingham University and Birmingham Public Libraries. BLCMP has also created a serials data base of some 20,000 titles. The libraries of the Birmingham Polytechnic, Aalborg University (Denmark), and the University of Bradford are now members of BLCMP, and use of the union catalog data base is being extended to other libraries in the West Midlands area.⁵ An automated cooperative order system is being designed by the BLCMP staff and will be tested at Birmingham Polytechnic.⁶

Of importance to the lending of books among libraries has been the creation of a National ISBN Interlending System.⁷ It is an extension of the International Standard Book Number system, designed by the London and South Eastern Library Region (LASER) with the aid of the British Library, to all U.K. Regional Interlending Systems, and marks a significant new phase in the interlending system of the country. The

participating libraries list ISBNs of English-language books added to stock of the regional headquarters every two months according to a prearranged timetable. The library location numbers and ISBNs are punched onto 80-column data cards, and are read into an IBM 360 computer every eight weeks. Records failing validation generate error reports and are rejected, while all valid numbers are sorted into ISBN order and the master file is then updated. Output is on COM and copies are sold to libraries which use it for the purposes of direct interlending, thus speeding up the interloan of books and reducing the pressure on regional headquarters.

As a result of its success with the ISBN system, LASER was asked by its member libraries to convert its conventional author union catalog, containing some 1.25 million entries, to machine-readable form to be used as a data base for the creation of local catalogs. A feasibility study was undertaken in 1972 with the aid of an OSTI grant,⁸ and the full-scale retrospective conversion was begun in June 1973 and should be completed by April 1976. As part of this project, LASER, with the financial assistance of the British Library (formerly the British National Bibliography, BNB), converted the BNB entries for 1950-68 to MARC compatible form, and this material is now available from the British Library. In addition to providing a service for its own libraries, the LASER data base will be used as the base for retrospective conversions by libraries outside the area.⁹

LASER is presently engaged in a research project on Cooperation in Library Automation (COLA), supported by a grant from the British Library's Research and Development Department. It is the first stage of an extended project with the objective of providing answers to the following questions: To what extent is collaboration between libraries in the use of computing systems both feasible and economical? Is it practical to envisage computing systems devoted primarily to library use rather than the current situation, where libraries are peripheral users of equipment acquired for other purposes? How should the position of libraries in relation to the British Library develop insofar as the dissemination of bibliographic data is concerned, and what role might LASER and other library centers play in the development of library computing services? This stage of the project is limited to searching literature, technical evaluation of published material, visits to centers experienced in this area, and proposals for the extension of the project into the design (or identification if pre-existing) of model systems for collaborative automation and their practical evaluation.

From the study it appears that collaborative systems for library

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automation, and cooperation at all levels of development and use of computing systems in libraries, are practical and economical.

The high cost of library automation systems indicates that any library considering automation must seriously consider the re-use of existing software. The role and function of central bibliographic and cataloging agencies (BLBSD, BLCMP, and Cooperative College Library Center) are well established, and their automation systems are comprehensive. There is no need to develop more than marginal extensions to existing bibliographic center software.

There is considerable potential for the use of both isolated and network-based minicomputer systems in libraries. An interesting development in academic library cooperation is the South West Academic Libraries Cooperative Automation Project (SWALCAP).¹⁰ Since 1969 a research team at Bristol University Library, in collaboration with Exeter University and University College, Cardiff, has been working on the establishment of a central library computer system of three cooperating libraries linked on-line to a central unit. The first part of the project will develop circulation systems in the three libraries; the later stages will be concerned with cataloging and acquisition systems. The configuration will use a Rank Xerox 530 computer with Computer Automation Alpha LSI-2/20 terminal minicomputers, visual-display units and Automated Library Systems book-charging terminals.

A joint study (Project LOC) to provide access to the early books in the colleges of Oxford and Cambridge was set up in 1968 with a grant of \$55,000 from the Old Dominion Foundation. A recent report shows that the catalog entries for pre-1801 holdings in the British Museum would number 570,000, in the Bodleian library 210,000, and in Cambridge University 145,000, while those in the college and other libraries in Cambridge would number 240,000 and in Oxford 490,000.¹¹ The project team has investigated the problems involved and techniques required to compile a machine-readable union catalog and to record and match books; they settled for a transcript using only title page and colophon, plus a "fingerprint" consisting of the last two characters on three specified lines close to the bottom of each of three specified pages of each book. The likely cost of the total project would be £750,000 to £1 million over a period of eight years, excluding printing and publication costs.

To return to the twentieth century, librarians are increasingly aware of the need to provide nonbook materials for their users. Many forms of information on records and cassettes can be borrowed from public

libraries, including poetry, drama, music, languages, sound effects, etc. To achieve full coverage of items issued in Britain and to make them available for lending, the thirty-three London public libraries have recently established the Greater London Audio Subject Specialisation Scheme (GLASS). This scheme of cooperative purchase and storage highlights the need for adequate bibliographic records of this material.

The problems of improving information and cataloging services for nonbook materials in the United Kingdom have been under discussion since 1970, when work was begun by the Council for Educational Technology (CET) in cooperation with the National Libraries Automatic Data Processing Study.¹²

The British Library and CET have established a joint study of improved bibliographic service for audiovisual materials; the report of the study is to be presented to the British Library Board and the CET Executive Committee.¹³ The study will cover the needs of audiovisual cataloging agencies, patterns of existing bibliographic provision, the technical feasibility of creating a cooperative system built around computer-based facilities, and the operational and management options and costs for such a system.

In the field of indexing and the retrieval of information, one of the most interesting recent developments has been PRECIS. The standard manual of PRECIS was published in 1974¹⁴ and was developed by the BNB with support from OSTI. It is a chain classification system for subject indexing using natural language, with provision for auxiliary annotations. PRECIS is used by the British and Australian national bibliographies and by various other indexing agencies in the United Kingdom and abroad.

In this article, it has been possible to give only an outline of the recent trends in library cooperation. Other developments, notably regional and national transport networks between libraries, are being investigated; for example, a limited regional transport system was set up in the Yorkshire region in April 1974.

It is evident that as economic conditions worsen and the effects of inflation become more apparent, the sharing of library resources by cooperation and collaboration becomes more attractive.

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